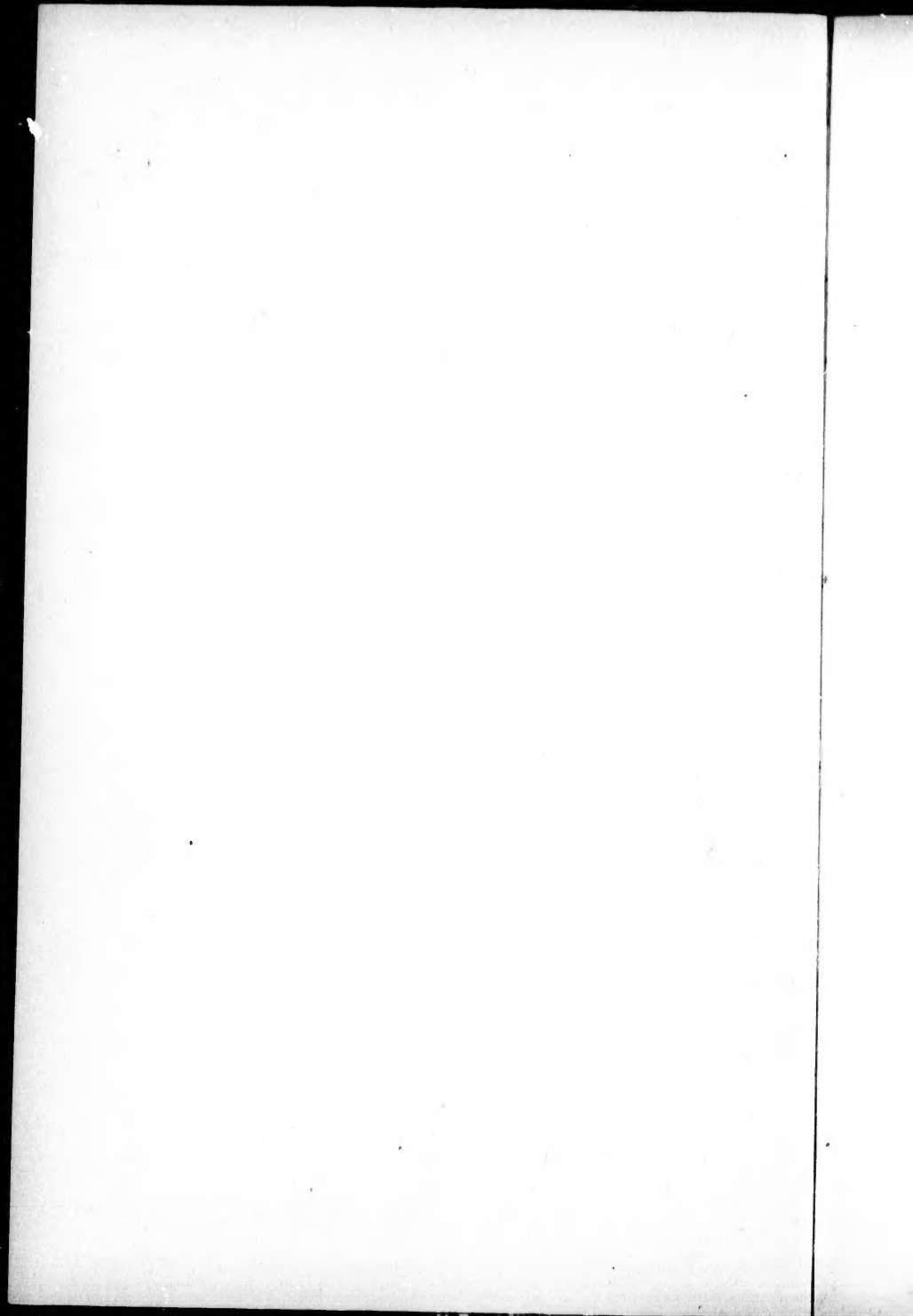




A
COMMEMORATIVE ORATION.

DELIVERED AT THE

FOURTEENTH ENCÆNIA

IN

KING'S COLLEGE, FREDERICTON,

JUNE 27, 1844,

BY

EDWIN JACOB, D. D., VICE PRESIDENT.

FREDERICTON:

JOHN SIMPSON, PRINTER TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

1844.

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In

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

SIR WILLIAM MACBEAN GEORGE COLEBROOKE, K.H.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF NEW BRUNSWICK,

AND

CHANCELLOR OF ITS UNIVERSITY,

THE FOLLOWING

ORATION,

PRINTED AT HIS EXCELLENCY'S DESIRE,

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED;

In testimony of the Author's grateful sense of the enlightened and comprehensive benevolence evinced by his exertions for the improvement of the People committed to his charge.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author thinks it right to remark, that in revising the following Oration for the press, he has substituted or inserted a few explanatory words, for the purpose of removing any ambiguity or obscurity which might attach to too great conciseness of expression.

COMMEMORATIVE ORATION.

THE Commemoration of Benefactors arises from the primary obligations of morality. Since universal justice consists in rendering to every one his due, we are manifestly under obligation to those who have contributed to our good. But an actual return of the benefit received being in very many instances impracticable, what compensation shall we then make, but that which the grateful heart has always at command—the just acknowledgment of honor and praise? Such is a large part of our duty towards God; such is the constant expression of filial piety; and such a tribute we undoubtedly owe to those representatives and instruments of the Divine Benevolence, who, by the institution and support of this College, have in not a low degree provided for our welfare.

To all persons therefore to whom we are so indebted—to Princes and their Ministers, who, by the grant of a Royal Charter and Endowment, have here discovered their regard for the highest interests of their subjects; to Governors and those of their Council who recommended, promoted, or executed the patriotic design; to Legislators, Members of our own Council, and other Officers of the establishment; to those who by the foundation of Medals and Scholarships, or by contributions to our Library, have displayed their munificence or shewn their good will;—to all these, whether removed to the world of hope and retribution, or still for a little while remaining on this earth, be the homage of our grateful memories duly paid!

These, however, our Founders and Benefactors, and the deeds by which they established their title to our gratitude, have all been celebrated on former occasions; and cannot but be familiarly remembered by most of those whom I address. Whence then (for I am not aware of any remarkable benefaction during the past year) shall I take the topics of my discourse? Shall I, as has been sometimes done, expatiate on the value of knowledge, and point out the excellencies of an Academical education? Shall I enter again into the question of means, and propose to demonstrate the wisdom and propriety of our Collegiate organization? Or shall I proclaim the merits of those who have (*laboured*, can I say? at least, have) distinguished themselves by their attempts to amend its attributed errors? I must confess my disinclination for any one of these undertakings. The first were evidently superfluous; the second, perhaps, not altogether accordant with sincerity; for the last—were my duty on this occasion less positively prescribed, and could I feel myself at liberty to assume the office and licence of the poet, I might require scarcely a farther incitement than the inconsistency which has characterized some of the proceedings for the amendment of the Charter; like the burning Roman, I might be satisfied to refer to the irresistible provocation of notorious facts, and consider it a sufficient apology to say—

“*Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum.*”

Declining these topics, therefore, I beg leave to present you a few observations on the great object which our Charter first proposes to the enquiry and pursuit of this whole University; namely, “*THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.*” For in “the principles” of this Religion, before all other subjects of literature and of science, that fundamental law of our institution prescribes that the

youth of the Province should be here instructed. And, as a great variety of views is known to prevail on this important subject, it can hardly be deemed inappropriate if I briefly set before you the method by which, in my own judgment at least, we may hope to lead our scholars to that which shall be the nearest approximation to the truth.

What then is the Christian Religion? How shall we ascertain its principles? And where shall we find the best representation of the system?

Now, whatever other differences or difficulties may present themselves, no reasonable doubt can be entertained concerning the actual and immediate origin of our Religion. For, although Rabbinical writers, from an almost incredible ignorance of chronology, have referred it to a somewhat earlier era, the historical evidence is perfectly conclusive that its Author, appearing in Judea in the age of the Herods, suffered death at Jerusalem under the government of Pontius Pilatus. In this fact all Christians have constantly agreed; as it is indeed sufficiently attested by the Roman writings of Tacitus and Suetonius. In that age then and country Jesus of Nazareth first taught the doctrine, which his Galilean disciples afterwards proclaimed and promulgated; and which, in the course of a few years, was embraced by multitudes in almost every part of the vast Roman Empire, co-extensive as it was with the then civilized world.

Thus much is incontrovertible. But when we proceed to enquire after the doctrine itself, we encounter a remarkable paradox;—of this doctrine, thus rapidly and widely communicated, not a word was committed to writing by the hand of the Author: whatever reason

may be assigned, whatever inferences be imagined to follow, *Jesus himself wrote not*—unless it were that sentence inscribed upon the ground, the characters of which I know not that any man ever undertook to decypher: no laws, no commentaries, no golden verses, nothing but a letter of a few words (the invention, probably, of a later age—although certainly found by Eusebius in the archives of Edessa, and received as genuine by many of equal learning and judgment;) nothing more than this doubtful reply to the application of King Abgarus, has ever been ascribed to his pen.

Let it not however be hastily concluded that the nature of his doctrine must therefore be uncertain. Pythagoras, the venerable father of Grecian philosophy, and Socrates, its admirable moral reformer, committed not their thoughts to written monuments; yet little doubt is entertained respecting the principal opinions of Pythagoras; and with Socrates the historical student feels himself as well acquainted as if he had lived in our days and taught in our schools. And why? Because the disciples of those superior men recorded their instructions; and these records, preserved and acknowledged by their followers, have, either in whole or in part, descended to our time and fallen into our own hands. In the case of Socrates especially, the scholar is perfectly assured; because, under the hands of Xenophon and Plato, he possesses authentic memoirs of his conversation, with a defence of his character; the truth of which no man calls in question. Why then should any question be raised concerning the doctrine of the blessed Jesus, of which the writings of his disciples contain more abundant and assuring testimonies? We have in the volume which all Christians hold sacred, four distinct memoirs of the actions and discourse of Jesus, bearing every mark of authenticity and love of truth; two of

them from the pens of his constant attendants; one apparently written at a very early time, the other towards the end of a long and holy life; a third to all appearance from a diligent attendant, at least, on the Apostles; and the fourth professedly collected from the several concurring narratives of those who had been eye-witnesses and ministers of the Author of the Gospel. We have also from the pen of this last described Evangelist a continuation of the narrative for a considerable series of years, exhibiting the progress of Christianity until it had reached Rome, the capital of the world; together with a collection of Apostolic letters, and a book of awful admonition and prediction: all clearly concurring to attest the views of Divine truth actually embraced and universally communicated by the immediate disciples of Jesus Christ.

The question however arises,—Do these writings, authentic and valuable as they are, contain the whole of those views? Might there not have been other writings from the same pens, or other primitive writers? Or might not the Apostles, like their great Master, have taught much by oral discourse, which no pen of that age ever recorded?—And it must indeed be acknowledged that a number of writings, professedly of the earliest age, has been collected by the learned industry of Fabricius; while oral tradition is asserted as the channel of many instructions which some Christians, those of the Roman communion more especially, maintain to have descended from the primitive propagators of the Catholic faith.

But it has been satisfactorily proved, more particularly by the researches of the indefatigable Lardner, that no books, other than those which are now termed Canonical, ever obtained general reception as authentic records of

the first age of Christianity : while, with regard to these books, it is as certainly demonstrated that most of them were, from the ostensible dates of their publication, received with undoubting confidence and veneration by the great body of Christians throughout the several countries of the world. And as to oral tradition, although it is obvious and undeniable that the doctrine of our holy Religion was thus taught in the first instance, not by Jesus himself only, but by all his Apostles ; and although much might, or indeed must, have been said by him and them which could never have been committed to writing : it is however in the highest degree improbable that any thing accounted of great and general importance among Christians, any fundamental or essential part of our Religion should have escaped all notice in the several memoirs of Christ ; in the Acts of the Apostles ; in their Epistles to various churches, to official and private persons, and to widely-spread multitudes of Christians ; and, finally, in the " faithful and true " testimony of " the Revelation of Jesus Christ."

Highly interesting therefore as is the subsequent history of the Church dispersed throughout the world, and solicitous as on many other accounts we may justly be to discover the sentiments of Christians who lived in succeeding times—whether individually or collectively expressed ; in the works of a Justin, an Irenæus, a Tertullian ; or in the Creeds and Canons of Councils : still it is not in these, in any or all of these, that I could look for the original and unquestionable " principles of the Christian Religion." With far better reason, I conceive, should we first endeavour to ascertain such principles, as they stand recorded in the sacred pages of the New Testament ; and then proceed, with Mosheim, or Milner, or Jeffery, to trace the subsequent history of these principles—their maintenance or loss, prevalence or decline,

preservation in primitive purity or corruption by foreign admixtures, as the facts may prove to have been, in the all-changing revolutions of time.

But although the intrinsic principles of Christianity are thus to be ascertained, when or where, it might be asked, was the system completed? What shall we take for a perfect exemplar of the Religion of Jesus the Christ?

And here it is that the great differences appear among Christian denominations. Some suppose that the several primitive congregations, as collected and taught by the Apostles, must from their first formation have possessed all that could be essential to Christian faith and life. Some, while hardly questioning this assumption, consider that state of the churches more advanced towards perfection, in which the Apostles left them at the conclusion of their ministry. Some, again, appear to regard "the Spirit of Truth" as remaining in the general Church, and directing the main body of believers, until the establishment of the Christian Religion by the laws of the Roman Empire. Others maintain that this Religion could not attain its maturity until the plenary developement of Œcumenical, Patriarchal, or Papal authority. And others discover a natural predilection for some of the numerous modifications which have followed the dismemberment or dissolution of the Imperial body. While not a few, nor possibly the least enlightened, investigators of Divine truth, extend their view through and over all these forms of our Religion, to a far more perfect state—a holier city, temple and kingdom yet to come.

Which of these theories the unprejudiced enquirer ought to adopt, is confessedly a question of deep im-

portance; nor would it be consistent with modesty to pretend that arguments of great apparent force may not be adduced in support of each. Into these arguments, of course, I cannot now enter; but (it may perhaps be permitted me, with somewhat of an Eclectic spirit, to observe) I know not how to doubt that, wherever an Apostle of Christ preached the Gospel and formed a church, there he must have taught all which he then considered essential to the salvation of every individual member of that church;—that whatever in process of time “it seemed good (to use the language of the first and only Apostolic Council) to the Holy Ghost and to” these his prophets and agents, to institute as expedient, or enjoin as necessary, that—*were Christians in similar circumstances*—must be expedient or necessary still;—that peculiar veneration and deference, although certainly not implicit submission, are due to the judgment and example of those who were content to lose and to suffer for their conscientious profession of their Christian faith;—that in every community professing that faith—state, kingdom, or empire—great must naturally and properly have been the dignity and authority of the chief or metropolitan pastor, and greater still those of the accredited representatives of the whole Christian people;—and, lastly, that a complete fulfilment of the prophetic representations of the Messiah’s kingdom requires a spiritual and moral renovation far surpassing the past or present attainments of the Christian Church.

But, with all these acknowledgments and concessions, at what conclusion have I arrived? At none in the slightest degree at variance with the comprehensive proposition of the irrefutable Chillingworth, that “**THE BIBLE, THE BIBLE ONLY, IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS.**” For most cordially can I acquiesce in the striking remarks of another clear and powerful writer,

that "the question so much agitated in regard to the original form of government is by no means of that consequence which warm disputants, misled by party prejudices and intemperate zeal, would affect to make it. To me (as Campbell, whom I quote with some abridgment, proceeds to declare) nothing is more evident, than that the essence of Christianity, abstractedly considered, consists in the system of doctrines and duties revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ; and that the essence of the Christian character consists in the belief of the one and the obedience of the other. Not but that a certain external model of government must have been originally adopted for the more effectual preservation of the evangelical institution in its native purity, and for the careful transmission of it to after ages. Not but that a presumptuous encroachment on what is evidently so instituted, is justly reprehensible in such as are properly chargeable with such encroachment. But the reprehension can affect those only who are conscious of the guilt; for the fault of another will never frustrate to me the Divine promise given by the Messiah, the great interpreter of the Father, 'the faithful and true witness.' I may be deceived (the single-hearted believer might say) in regard to the pretensions of a minister: I am no antiquary; and may not have either the knowledge or the capacity necessary for tracing the faint outlines of ancient establishments, for entering into dark and critical questions about the import of names and titles, or for examining the authenticity of endless genealogies; but I may have all the evidence which consciousness can give, that I thankfully receive the testimony of Christ, whom I believe, and love, and serve. If I cannot know this, the declarations of the Gospel are given me to no purpose; its promises are no better than riddles; and a rule of life is a dream. But if I may be conscious of this, and if the Christian Religion be a

revelation from heaven, I may have all the security which the veracity of God can give me that I shall obtain eternal life."

With these fundamental axioms firmly established, we, who are enabled by Divine Providence to pursue such investigations, may proceed in steady confidence to the study of the New Testament. We call in the aids of contemporary or analogous literature, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, to explain obscure or doubtful expressions. We place ourselves in well-informed and regulated imagination amidst the scenes and inhabitants of the then present world; and refer, as did the Divine speaker and the sacred writers, to the memorials of former dispensations, and to the state and history of mankind. We follow the streams of "living water," as they diverge through various countries, and continue to descend during the course of ages; and we joyfully anticipate their clearance from contracted impurities, and the diffusion of their blessings over the still thirsty and barren regions of the earth. We apply our Christian knowledge to ourselves—to our own time and place, country and church; and endeavour to prepare ourselves for the faithful and effective discharge of our own duties, and the realization of our temporal and immortal hopes.

Is it a groundless or unwarrantable persuasion that, should the youth repairing hither for education be *thus* instructed in the principles of the Christian Religion, this College would be likely to fulfil the declared intentions of its Founders, in contributing to the good—the truest and highest good—of the Province? Thus sanctified by the unction of Divine "grace and truth," all their other attainments in literature and in science might be expected to be employed in the best manner, and directed to the happiest ends. The Clergyman, I need

scarcely say, would thus be prepared for the beneficial discharge of his most important duties ; firm in faith, clear and sound in doctrine, zealous for holiness and virtue, and at the same time candid and charitable towards all men. The Civilian, to whatever profession or occupation destined, having the principles of true religion, comprising or enjoining all moral duty, implanted in his mind, would be disposed to exert his various talents as the servant and steward of the Lord of all ; for the health, wealth and comfort, the present and the future welfare of his fellow-men. All over whom the influence of this institution might prevail, no longer exposed to be "carried about by every blast of vain doctrine," would be "established in the truth of Christ's holy Gospel ;" and, justly appreciating their position and relations, would respect their neighbour's rights, bear with his prejudices, errors and infirmities, and cheerfully contribute to the general good.

Such, according to my humble but considerate and settled opinion, is the proper office and duty of our College ; to the full performance of which I trust that all its Officers will with advancing years be found yet more and more devoted ; accomplishing, to the best of their judgment and the utmost of their ability, the design of our Founders and Benefactors ; and enjoying, in the reflections of a good conscience, the hope that they will not have laboured in vain.